

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
10/12/2008

Invited to the Feast
Matthew 22:1-14

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

- 1 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying,
- 2 The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,
- 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.
- 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.
- 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,
- 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.
- 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.
- 8 Then he said to his servants, The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.
- 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.
- 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

- 11 But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.
- 12 And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.
- 13 Then the king said to the attendants, Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- 14 For many are called, but few are chosen. (ESV)

Later this morning marks a celebration, the culmination of a summer of long and hard work. It marks the beginning of a new era in the life of the school, an era that says we are on the cutting edge of educational technology. Today we dedicate the new computer lab, and pray God's rich blessings on our students and teachers as they use this tool both to the glory of God and for their own learning.

Last week, as originally planned, the lab was stripped bare and taken to Breckenridge for the Rocky Mountain District Professional Church Workers' Conferences. About seventy teachers and administrators, plus a handful of pastors, got a look at our hardware and software. During the conference, there were no problems with the system, no difficulties in presenting

information or demonstrating the systems. The thin-clients and servers simply did the jobs for which they were installed.

Most of the teachers asked, "How much did you pay for the software?" They expected that the school invested at least \$10,000 for the operating systems, office suites, and educational programs. They could not believe that the software was free; free as in beer, and free as in freedom. Quickly they grasped the idea when the freedom of the software was compared to the freedom of the Gospel.

What a joy to present to an audience of Lutheran educators who could hear, "The programs are free in the same way that your salvation is free." We could speak of faith, we could speak of grace, and clearly everyone understood the nature of Open Source software. Not that free software will save your soul from sin, death, and the power of the devil, but it underscores the freedom that comes from knowing our sins are forgiven.

So what does this computer lab have to do with the feast the King held for His Son? Beyond the offering of something of value for the good of all, not demanding works, not demanding a price, absolutely nothing. The invitation is made to one and all that they can use the software, the offer of salvation is made to one and all that Christ died to pay the price of their sins. We can reject the software, we can reject the offer of God's grace.

On the Sunday of Holy Week, Jesus rode into Jerusalem upon the back of a young donkey. When He came around the Mount of Olives on the road from Bethany, and Jerusalem was revealed in its full glory, our Lord wept. Later the same week He lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would

not!" [Matthew 23:37 (ESV)]

Time and again during this final week our Lord warned the people of the wrath of God which would be revealed. Speaking in parables, speaking plainly, He told the leaders and all who would listen that God was going to judge the people. The one who rejects the Son of God will have no place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Indeed, even on earth they will be judged and scattered.

Lets begin with the prophetic aspects of this parable.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast. But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

From the time of the Patriarchs to the time of Christ, our Lord God had sent prophets to the Children of Israel. The prophets called the people to repent, to place their trust in the one true God, to reject the idols of the heathen. The prophets proclaimed God's grace and mercy, His forgiveness and love. But the people rejected the prophets and, thus, rejected God.

When the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world, those to whom the promise had been made should have rejoiced. Yet the rulers, the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises. They killed the Son of God, for Jesus' teachings did not agree with their selfish notions of God.

The cares of the world and desires for wealth kept some from God's wedding feast. Direct hatred and rebellion against the Son of God kept others from the feast. Those who had been

invited rejected God's grace and mercy.

Forty years after these words were spoken, Jerusalem lay in ruins. Burned, gutted, and finally destroyed, hardly a wall was left standing. Just as Jesus had predicted, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, the surrounding districts denuded of vegetation, the proud buildings hurled to the ground.

God's chosen people rejected God. The day of their salvation came and passed, and they did not recognize the time of God's visitation. As a nation, the Children of Israel are no longer treated as the chosen ones. They rejected God, thus did God reject them.

Then he said to his servants, The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Fifty days after Easter, ten days after Christ Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were gathered together. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they boldly proclaimed salvation by grace through faith for the sake of Christ. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, stood in the midst of the gathered throngs and accused them of the murder of Jesus. He called the crowds to repent, to be forgiven, and to be numbered among those who have faith in Jesus as their Savior.

As the Christian Church grew, persecutions also grew. Disciples and believers left Jerusalem and went to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Gentiles without number heard the good news of salvation and came in to the wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. These people heard the Gospel, were baptized and thus clothed with the righteousness of God. They were joined with Christ and sit at His heavenly feast wherein He gives them His body and

blood for the forgiveness of sins.

But not all who are part of the visible church on earth are faithful to Christ Jesus.

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

The wedding garment is nothing less than the clothing of righteousness given to us through baptism. Isaiah spoke several times of the garments of righteousness and the clothing of salvation. Paul also spoke of putting on righteousness. The wedding garment therefore is given to each guest by the King. He who trusts that his own clothing is sufficient, who trusts on his own works, will be sorely disappointed.

Thus in the church militant, the visible church on earth, reside those who have the outward signs of faith but who are hypocrites. They lack true faith in Jesus, but desire that their own works be counted as worthy of life everlasting. On the last day these hypocrites will be revealed and cast from God's presence.

This parable also speaks to aspects of faith. The feast which has been prepared is the wedding feast of the Son of the King. Luther, in one sermon on this text, speaks of the relationship of the bride to the bridegroom. In marriage, he reminds us, we find reflected the relationship of Christ and the Church. For Christ, the bridegroom, gives His all to the Church. Christ gives the Church holiness where there was once sin, He gives the Church life everlasting where there was once death. He gives the Church true peace where there was once fear.

Many people are invited to the wedding feast. Those with a previous invitation may be considered people raised in the church from birth. God says, "Come to the feast," and they reject

His gracious invitation. God again pleads, "Come to the feast," but His words fall on deaf ears. Some who have heard the Word of God since birth care nothing for it, for they cannot see themselves as sinners.

Yet the Church seeks to find those who have not heard of the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. The Church proclaims Christ crucified to a sin-sick world. The Church, as empowered through the working of the Holy Spirit, pleads with people to come and hear of God's rich grace and mercy.

Many in the church reject this gift of grace. They enter the banquet hall, but on their own terms. They reject the pure doctrines of the Bible, they reject salvation by grace through faith for the sake of Christ. They reject God's grace and mercy, even while bearing false witness of faith and piety.

The person who rejects God's garment of salvation and relies on his own works indeed mocks and ridicules God. Such people in the church will be shown on the last day. They will be cast from God's presence.

To those who heed the call is given the garment of salvation. Washed in the waters of baptism, they are clothed in God's righteousness. This garment is not of their own making, but is God's gift of grace. This garment is given to them without price, without merit or worthiness, but because of God's rich love and mercy.

Thus we pray for continued faith, that we hold firmly to the cross of Christ as our hope and our salvation. For only through His death and resurrection do we find the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Only in Him are we made holy and perfect in God's sight.

Jesus' last words are the most chilling of all. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Each person is called by the Holy Spirit through the proclaimed Gospel. To each person is offered the washing of regeneration and renewal. To each person is offered the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. To each person is offered the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Many reject this gift of grace. They refuse to enter the banquet hall, refuse to honor their Creator and King. Others enter the banquet hall, but do so clothed in their own righteousness. This, too, dishonors the King. In the end, they receive their just reward, the everlasting fires of hell. This condemnation is not at God's hand, but at their rejection of His grace and mercy.

Those not chosen are not chosen because they, themselves, have rejected God's gracious invitation. Our Lord God Heavenly Father desires that all people be saved, but has given to man the ability to reject Him.

Those chosen of God are in the banquet hall because the Holy Spirit called them with the Gospel. They heard of their need for a Savior, and of Christ's death and resurrection. They received faith through the sacrament of baptism, and the assurance of God's grace and favor through the absolution.

This feast is not merely an allegory, a picture with a lesson. This feast is indeed real, for on the night our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed He invited us to partake of a true and real feast. In the Lord's Supper we are guests at our Lord's table, eating at the wedding feast of the Lamb of God in His kingdom.

The faithful who are gathered at the Lord's table are gathered at His invitation to receive His good gifts. They are nourished with the body and blood of Jesus Christ given in and under the bread and wine for the strengthening of faith and the forgiveness of sins. They are saved

because of God's unfathomable love, of His unspeakable mercy, and of His incomprehensible goodness.

The feast is ready. Even now the faithful are gathered in God's banquet hall for the marriage of Christ and the Church. As we partake of the Supper on earth, we are joining all the Church triumphant in celebrating the forgiveness given by God. We not only remember Christ in this sacred meal, but are given forgiveness through His body and blood.

God grant you His good gifts of faith and life, that you may be assured of His grace and mercy both now and forevermore.

In the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.